

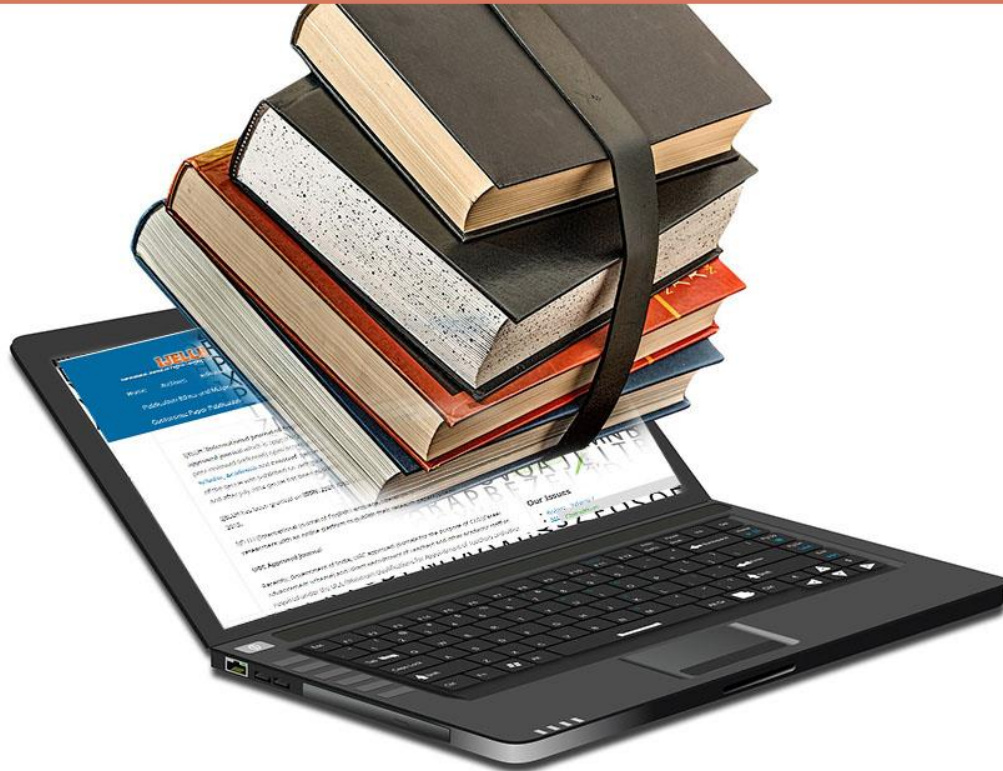
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Reading the Socio-Political Unrest: A Critical Inquiry into the Shared Space of “Third World Literature”

Abstract

The daring to perceive and inscribe optimistically, even in the midst of sheer violence and hopelessness, takes a narrative to another level where it becomes perennial and acknowledged. Identifying writers who are the ambassadors of different cultures and nations, (un)noticed at times, this paper undertakes an attempt to link the select works of Gabriel García Márquez (Latin America) with that of the Political Modernist Fictions from the context of Kerala. The texts opted from two different cultural backdrops have made “perceptible impact on their cultures, i.e. reflect the socio-political conditions or transformations of their societies, rather than those whose works are primarily valued as literary artifacts” (Sherrif 6). When Márquez drew the most intricate and atrocious picture of Latin America's omnipresent demon of patriarchy, within the Kerala context, the works of writers like Pattathuvila Karunkaran, U.P. Jayarajan, V.P. Shivakumar, John Abraham and P.K. Nanu realistically dealt with the political environment between the 1960's and 1990's.

This paper seeks to compare the two works of Márquez, The Autumn of the Patriarch (1975) and The General in his Labyrinth (1989) with the short story collection of the above-mentioned writers from the context of Kerala, published collectively as Reverberations of Spring Thunder (Trans. 2000). A study of the aesthetics of these narratives that deal with the political atmosphere within two different continents, alongside modern elements would help re-draw the shared experiences and its varying versions.

Keywords

Shared Space, Third World Literature, Latin America, Political Modernist Fictions.

Introduction

“It was like entering the atmosphere of another age, because the air was thinner in the rubble pits of the vast layer of power, and the silence was more ancient, and things were hard to see in the decrepit light” (APⁱ 2). One can experience the same, as the narrative kick starts in the opening passage of AP. This magical aura created by the narratives of Gabriel García Márquez’s works is so tremendous, that it turned out to be a universal phenomenon. Diverse situations and characters with irreplaceable traits, one among the several features of Márquez’s works, places each of his narratives several steps ahead of other writers, subsequently making his works challenges to be studied and explored. Why/what is it that one can relate between Márquez and Kerala is a possible question that can be raised by any reader. The comparison between the selected works in this paper, to an extent, is a venture to address the above mentioned inquiry.

Making an allowance for several literary works after the Second World War, Márquez's "solitude, power and love" remain stirring; the trinities that were least deliberated, and that never would be figured out again so profoundly and differently. The supremacy of these human emotions is equally romantic and opinionated, grounded in stark reality. Here the liberty that Márquez exhibits through magic realism stands apart. The characters within his narratives are the embodiment of varying emotions, capable enough to make each reader addicted to the situations portrayed. By painting the whole life of Latin America on a single canvas, Márquez could draw the attention of readers across globe.

In the same way, in the political modernist fiction writing of Kerala, a parallel trend is marked between the 1960s and 1980s. Besides, the writers of the same age estranged themselves from the predetermined ideologies of modernist approach on art and culture. In its place they carved out a path of their own, affirming the social commitment that a writer needs to have to one's society one belongs to. Exploring the literary movements of this period, a tendency of drifting apart from the earlier works and moving towards a new ethics is noticeable – an engagement with a constant struggle against the consumerist and capitalist ideologies.

Especially, the plays staged were intermingled with day-to-day affairs of ordinary life, with their sorrows and joys. Two major works which brought out path-breaking results were Thoppil Bhasi's *Ningalenne Communistakki* and K. J. Baby's *Nadugadhika*ⁱⁱ. In the collection of short stories titled *Reverberations of Spring Thunder*ⁱⁱⁱ, we come across the writers who have seriously negotiated with the socio-political issues within the context of Kerala during 1960- 90. Pattathuvila Karunkaran, U.P. Jayarajan, V. P. Shivakumar, John Abraham, and P.K. Nanu brought into the limelight several issues with related class and caste issues, which were ignored by the general public.

Political Unrest

Through his Patriarch, general and the assorted voices within the narrative, Márquez identifies the very existence of the ordinary Latin American life. Nonetheless, at times the history drawn through the narrative seems entwined with several events. A clear decoding helps in analyzing the interplay between the game of 'power and language' that is transfused all over the Latin American society. It urges one to revise and scrutinize the cultural phenomenon of power/ patriarchy and language. History is overturned by power, worded differently; we see how history is re-written with the subtlety of power and language.

[...] he would shut himself up in his office to decide the destiny of the nation with the commandment of the forces of the landing and sign all manner of laws and decrees with his thumbprint, for in those days he did not know how to read or write, but when they left him alone with his nation and his power again he did not poison his blood again with the sluggishness of written law, but governed orally and physically, present at every moment and everywhere [...] (AP 6-7).

The ruler within the narrative encapsulates all other rulers within history where supremacy has preceded everything that existed. Márquez could universalize his monarch and his ordinary folks, which has paved way for a wider understanding about the unusual perception of power. Not only does Márquez discuss about his monarch, but also recreates the history of Latin America. Concurrently, a purposeful effort is made by Márquez to code and decode the power system that has distorted history to an extent making the people confused. This is palpable within the narratives.

The chain of power drawn within the two selected novels of Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975) and *The General in his Labyrinth* (1989) explores how it gets expanded further, to such a degree where despotism even subverts history. Both these novels become supreme examples of autocracy where they display the malice of power and its manifestation within all arenas of life. The narratives seem to re-assert the lost linguistic identity of the region when he condemns the use of Latin language in ordinary discourse. The language that prevails within these two narratives takes it to a different realm which goes beyond the scope of this paper.

"Bendicion Alvarado didn't bring me into the world to pay heed to basins but to command, and after all I am who I am, and not you, so give thanks to God that this was only a game" (AP 16). At this point it can be stated that, the patriarch addresses himself as I, not by any name, where he accentuates his difference from others determinedly. The basic nature of the Patriarch within the narrative is that he carries no name. His nameless nature sketches the decisive position that he is above all title and supremacy. It becomes obvious that the system of politics trivializes the very presence of the other, where by the existence of the other remains in question. The same is done by the patriarch in this context. "I am not you". The phenomenon that becomes evident here is the patriarch despite his namelessness becomes part of the history. His namelessness along with his attitudes, his attitudes, and finally his whole life generates a myth within the language and culture of society. A striking fact about the Patriarch is that, he is not only a part of history but also his historicity. Though the Patriarch in his old age is alone and vulnerable, his very being and abhorrent nature is an unending annoyance. Thus the monarch becomes an archetype who is capable of consuming everything within his vicinity. The fact that

is marked here is the impact of power in redrawing the system of a nation's culture. For instance, the celebrations following the funeral ceremony becomes a public occupation.

In a very deplorable state we notice the Patriarch writing his name Zacarías, re-reading it, but being unable to accept his name, he tears the paper and proclaims to himself that "I am me" (AP 82). This substantiates the infinite power of the patriarch. From the very moment of the death of the patriarch, one can see how the common people begin their life from the present moment. Nevertheless, due to the dreadful nature of power, it functions mechanically and turns out to be natural. Sáenz de la Barra, the ruler who followed-the-leader subsequently was more vicious.

Márquez, through his Patriarch, illustrates the political picture of Latin America, efficiently universalizing the agony undergone by people under despotism and autocracy. The narratives emerge as an influential apparatus where Márquez converses about the history of power and the code of violence. For example, Thousand Days' War of 1899-1902 is the crux of *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1968), which is very evident within the narrative. Likewise, through the misrepresentation of the history of colonialism and imperialism, Márquez engenders within the readers the need to examine the policy of power that has annihilated the legacy of Latin America, which is familiar to other countries with a colonial past. Power being established through several autocratic methods turn up to be natural. The final result would be the way in which power becomes a reality or a truth that is apparent in this narrative. Gradually, it gets absorbed into the way of life, and a generation falls victims to this everlasting violence. This is the mechanism of power –to permeate into all segments of life.

Under the clutches of privatization, we witness the monarch even selling the Caribbean Sea. This privatization, that is to say, the process of denationalization leads to a general hostility

and abhorrence towards the Patriarch, as benevolence falls short. As a consequence, violence becomes an apparatus for the monarch that facilitates in asserting the whims and fancies of the system. In totality this becomes the code of living of a nation, when despotism reaches its climax. In another incident it is seen that how the patriarch manipulates the culture and replaces it.

[...] everything had been a farce, your excellency, a carnival apparatus that he himself had put together without really thinking about it when he decided that the corpse of his mother should be displayed for public veneration on a catafalque of ice long before anyone thought about the merits of his sainthood and only to contradict the evil tongues that said you were rotting away before you died, a circus trick which he had fallen into himself without knowing it ever since they came to him with the news general sir that his mother Benedic  n Alvarado was performing miracles and he had ordered her body carried in a magnificent procession into the most unknown corners of his vast country [...] (AP 98-99).

Considering Pattathuvila Karunakaran's Akbar's Upanishad, the first story from The Reverberation of Spring Thunder, what strikes a reader at the outset is the perceptible ideological eruptions within the narrative. The events are linked meticulously to the history, where the assertions of distinctive events drawn from the past are coupled with the events with utmost accuracy. For instance, the narrator reads about Lenin in a particular situation:

Listen to this! I read aloud from the book about the revolution of the Russian
Sudras: It was just 8.40 when a thundering wave of cheers announced the arrival
of a short, stocky figure with a big head, set down on his shoulders, bald and
bulging. Little eyes, a snobbish nose, wide, generous mouth and heavy chin, clean

shaven now, but already beginning to bristle with the well known beard of his past and future. Dressed in shabby clothes, his trousers much too long for him.

Unimpressive to be the idol of a mob, loved and revered as perhaps few leaders in history have been (Karunakaran 18).

The narrative dwells upon the issue of Sudras^{iv}, where it is discussed within the context of Russian ideologies and that of Manusmriti^v. An open discussion occurs throughout the narrative about Veda, Sudras and Lenin.

Lenin said: November 6 will be too early...on the other hand November 8 will be too late. We must act on the 7th, the day when the Congress meets so that we must stay to it, here is the power! What are you going to do with it? [...] Shall I read from the Veda? [...] The soul has no sex, but the body is male or female. In the Vedas the soul is referred to as 'it', not 'he'. 'He' would signify that Divinity is male. 'It' is unqualified and neutral. This is advaita (19).

Accordingly with the day-to-day events, Karunakaran mixes the historic details of the Russian revolution, where the narrative moves back and forth between the present and the past. Though narrator tries to detach from what is happening around in order to fully involve in the revolutionary aspects of life, it is apparent that the optimism which the narrator had about the revolution is waning and he is on the verge of an outburst. The story is intertwined in such a way that that reader is able to figure out the mental state of the narrator.

Again, Karunakaran's Divine Dispensations deals with the code of power that slaughters those within the margins of life. The narrative is oscillating between the present and the past and the narrator's voice shifts at diverse points in time. As the title itself explains, the speaker experiences and narrates the events within the present and past simultaneously, within his 'divine

dispensations'. Nowhere is it apparent that the narrator has witnessed the past event, and the same is narrated as if it is a continuing process:

That was almost five years ago. On the first day in custody, nothing dramatic happened, apart from the usual injuries. His new guardians—both the uniformed and the plain clothed variety— treated him politely, almost affectionately. That was the new sophisticated technique! Hot and cold! Please sit down. He sat down [...] there was no reply from Ayyapan. He looked stone deaf. Hours passed [...] you were in college for two years, weren't you? You have some sense [...] there can you hear? (31-32).

The narrative hinges round the plight of Ayyappan, a revolutionary, trampled under the power system . In the present the story begins through Kaveri (the first person narrator within the story), which is later carried over by Pater^{vi} and ends with Ayyappan in the past. But when the story ends, it is a collective voice.

Something was wrong, they felt. Let's try one last method. They brought some soap [...] some hopeful signs appeared at last. He went into a coma. Later, he opened his eyes for a moment with, what sounded like, a question on his lips. Ayyappan has passed into a long, painless coma. A living corpse, a vegetable! (34).

Both the above-mentioned narratives are the examples of the lives of two revolutionaries. Despite the fact that no hope appears within the two contexts, they cannot be stated as failure. The texts chosen from both the contexts turn out to be a model of its culture and tradition. Márquez within his narratives unmistakably depicts the cultural practices happening in the country; the feats, the celebrations, the fights etc., and the extent to which power can alter these

cultural and traditional set-up of a nation (all over again a subject of argument). The manner in which power manipulates the life of people is palpable in and out both the contexts; even religion is not spared. Here it can be surmised that the narrative substantiates how culture gets distorted and undergoes a continuous course of action towards its resumption. Even the religious norms get overturned as the power becomes so dictatorial and paramount.

The Paradox of Power and Freedom

An additional detail that is marked within the narrative is the dearth of general advancement within the life of the people or the nation; nothing seems advancing within the narrative, neither wealth nor life. People being away from politics can be a reason or the Patriarch being such a tyrant has not allowed growth. To have all the power can be the autumn for the patriarch. “Long live the stud, they shouted, blessed be the one who comes in the name of the truth, they shouted” (AP 88). At another situation, one can again notice the triviality of the deeds of the patriarch. “They had paid eighty pesos to a gypsy woman who pretended to give birth in the middle of the street to a two-headed monster as punishment for having said that the miracles had been set up by the government” (AP 98).

Within a different perspective, it can also be stated that, to a great extent, it was the people who venerated and glorified the Patriarch to a level that he was accepting the need to be an autocrat. He was left with the undeserved burden of truth,

[...] in this nation which I didn't choose willingly but which was given me as an established fact in the way you have seen it which is as it has always been since time immemorial with this feelings of unreality, with this smell of shit, with this un-historied people who don't believe in anything except life [...] (AP 100).

Thus it is clear that not only is the Patriarch responsible for the oppression undergone by the people, but also the people themselves. Although the Patriarch dies, the people are in a dilemma to accept the fact that they are free to live their life. A world devoid of the whims and fancies of the Patriarch seems unusual for them. At this point the code of culture facilitates them to evoke and revive the history which benefits the people for a change that awaits them. Wherein the politics fail, the cultural codes play a vital role in revamping the situation. It can also be argued that, it is the culture that in actuality turns the Patriarch to a myth.

Similar to the above context, John Abraham's *Feline Sorrow* discusses the existential crisis faced by the narrator along with the cat in the story. "Neither the kitten nor I had any foreboding of what was to befall us. I lived in the midst of arrack barons who had no qualms about adulterating the stuff they sold and giving unsuspecting revelers their queries as long as they donated generous sums to orphanages" (Abraham 38). These thoughts of the narrator symbolize the crisis that common people underwent during that era. The uncertainty that remained within the lives of people is the motif around which the story revolves and the narrator is addicted to liquor to escape the realities. "The arrack was consumed to wash down the sorrow of taking up other people's guilt without committing a single sin, mortal or venial. As the drinking progressed, my social commitment and sense of justice became more and more pronounced" (38).

The vagueness of life undergone by the people during the Indo-China War is the centre of *Broken Glasses* written by M. Sukumaran. The day when the narrator's glasses break, concurrently the same happens with many other people around him, where they lose their "long sight". When the narrator within the story loses his glasses, he shows a lackadaisical approach towards everything, symbolizing many others of his society. The manner in which the common

man trembles under the national unrest is rendered within the narrative. At times people lose their faith in the future, and leaves them in utter frustration and bleakness. But their story also gives the hint that there “were young men who had not yet been troubled by long sight” (Sukumaran 49).

When the story ends, we witness the Central Committee member’s speech in order to trigger off the spirit within several others similar to the narrator who seems devoid of hope. The committee member used no glasses, and represented a different section within the society looking forward for a better tomorrow albeit everything seems unfavorable.

Comrades, as we all know, a number of people here have had the experience of their glasses breaking, getting scratched or suddenly giving them a blurred vision. This may have been due to the sudden, brief tremor that was felt in these parts few days ago. However, a plot hatched by one of the monopolistic cartels of lens manufactures cannot be ruled out. Whatever the cause, the need of the hour is to overcome the crisis at any cost. Keep your prescriptions safely with you. Remove your glasses and put them away at the slightest hint of a tremor. Keep the glasses in their cases when you are not wearing them. And don’t forget to wipe them clean regularly (49-50).

From this point of time the narrator regains his spirit and gets back to normalcy. It symbolizes the clear vision that is attained by a group of people. The narrator sits back to apprehend what has happened for the past days, and at the particular point when the narrator recognizes the past and comprehends, it is almost dawn. This symbolizes the new beginning where the people are able to survive the adversities. The newspaper of the same day carries the news that the Indo-China has come to an end.

I was reading the last lines of the previous day's paper when the paper-boy appeared at the gate. The rolled-up paper came sailing through the air and landed at my feet. I picked it up, unrolled it and read the headlines in bold letters with joy: Peace returns to Indo- China. End to Vietnam War (50).

By adhering to the North Malabar dialect^{vii}, P. K. Nanu's *Alternatives* gives authenticity to the narrative. The narrative deals with the situation where the society is faltering, unable to speak as "the chain of sounds was broken abruptly" (Nanu 68). It's a collective "us" where the whole society is falling into the plight of speechlessness. "Nobody spoke a word. All they could do was to make signs at one another [...] but speech seemed to have deserted them" (Nanu 71). The narrative implicitly depicts the circumstances where even the thought process of each individual is conglomerated. "Libraries have degenerated into joints where you can just drop in to have a chat..." (69). A condition where everyone was searching for 'alternatives' so that they can consciously disregard/ run away from truths.

Writing as a Tool

At this juncture it is apparent that the writers have deliberately brought out the role of culture in re-drawing or re-shaping the history of a nation within both the contexts. Márquez deals with the mechanism of myth to fill the gap between culture and politics. At the point when the connection between history and power seems lost, myth takes over the errand by referring to the origins of the nation's culture. In a particular instance the Patriarch himself asks:

What was going on in the world because it's going on eight and everybody's asleep in this house of scoundrels, get up, you bastards, he shouted, the lights went on, they played reveille at three o'clock [...] and there was the noise of

startled arms, of roses that opened when there was still two hours left until dawn time [...] while he opened a way lighted by the day through the persistent adulators who proclaimed him the undoer of dawn, commander of time, and repository of light (AP 45).

It can be comprehended from the above passage how the patriarch re-orders the natural order. In many other instances, we see the Patriarch “stopped time by his orders on the abandoned streets” (AP 154), he imposed “state of plague by decree” (154) and even again “Sundays were suppressed” (154). As power manipulates the myth to such a great extent, the common people visualize the Patriarch as the ‘alpha and the omega’. Accordingly when the Patriarch dies all these codes of myth get disrupted where the people get a re-birth, “it was like entering the atmosphere of another age” (2).

Márquez through his narrative portrays how the people of Latin America are in their pursuit to re-create their historicity that was seized by power. In the beginning of the narrative one can perceive the voice of a collective narration, “only then did we dare to go in without attacking the crumbling walls of reinforced stones [...]” (2). Here Márquez is speaking about the whole Latin American context where everyone longs for a revival of cultural and traditional norms of life that was lost under the Patriarch. Following the death of the Patriarch, collectively, a whole nation shows the urge to reclaim freedom and peace. Along with this collective voice, it is evident that the voices are changing at times, from collective we to I and again we which includes the Patriarch too. Accordingly through the assorted voices, Márquez affirms the need of Latin America.

Despite the fact that a new perspective is brought out, *The General in his Labyrinth* is a further extension or an elaboration of what has happened in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. The

General is presented as an elaborative study of the other (the Patriarch). One compliments the other, through explanations and examples with diverse techniques and circumstances, providing us with information necessary to prove the history. Through *The General in his Labyrinth* by dealing with the history of more than forty five years and the uneasy life of the Latin Americans, Márquez portrays the whole Latin American life in its labyrinth. Dealing with the extensive and unrelenting years of political unrest, the narrative explains the inconceivability of life all through that period. The characteristic attribute that marks out the Patriarch from that of the General is the series of events depicted in AP. Those events are about the distant past which prefigured the contemptible future that the nation had to encounter. As the title itself suggests, the narrative deals with the game of power, a topsy-turvy world where nothing is permanent. “Weary of searching for a ray of hope on this blind men's journey, incapable of living bereft of a soul, he had decided to flee to Venezuela and lead an armed movement in favor of integration” (GL 83)^{viii}. Even the General seems at times unable to have the command over the whole situation, “I am no longer myself” (GL 27). *The General in his Labyrinth* portrays the solitude existing within the General’s journey towards his death. “As said by Gerald Martin, the novel can be described as the ‘death of another patriarch’ or ‘the solitude of seven months’. Power, solitude, and death are again the theme reverberated within the novel” (Jeevankumar 80). Similar are the cases of the General and the Patriarch, at a point of time both of them seem to be powerless to admit their dissolution of power. Even the name Bolívar is hardly ever used within the narrative.

In the fourth chapter of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, there is an instance where the term ‘General’ is used to refer to the Patriarch. “[H]e he was alone in the shadows looking for himself in the brackish water of his tears general [...]” (AP 105). These interconnections of the incidents

are strikingly evident within these two works. Garcia Marquez tells Maria Elvira Samper in an important interview published in the Colombian weekly *Semana* (20 March 1989)

El general is more important than the rest of my work put together. It demonstrates that my work as a whole is founded on a geographic and historical reality. That reality is not that of magical realism and all those other things which people talk about. When you read [this novel], you realize that everything else in some way has a documentary, geographic, and historical basis that is borne out by El general... all over again, but historically grounded this time” (Palencia, Michael, and Roth 56).

Each of the situations and characters is carefully chosen to convey in a specific way the underlying the political situation within both the contexts. The works in entirety makes the readers to look into the real world, and at the same time to the world of fiction that deals with things unimaginable. The upheavals are not only that of Latin American and Kerala context, but are relevant to the whole of the Third World, where slavery/oppression of the common man is still being practiced, in various forms.

Collectively, from both the contexts, the narratives deal with the disintegration of power.

The common connecting factors evident within the works from both the contexts are the shared experiences of the crisis encountered within the economic and political arena. Though differences are obvious within the political circumstances of the two contexts, the economic status can be viewed in parallel. Though the frame of “third world” has several short comings, in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Fredric Jameson^{ix} presents a theory of the then current state of world literature.

In the essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, Fredric Jameson argues that all third world texts are to be read as “national allegories” (Jameson 69) because “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society” (67). For Jameson, the denial of a “placeless individuality” to the third world leads to “the allegorical nature of third-world culture, where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself” (85-86). This paper keeps Jameson’s view in the background, giving a clear notion featuring the fundamental changes that differentiates the third world’s literature from that of other literatures. The narratives chosen from both the contexts are meant to awaken the common people to the alternate possibilities for social structures that they might pursue.

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ⁱ AP is used as the short form for the novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch* throughout the paper.

ⁱⁱ Thoppil Bhasi (1924 –1992) and K. J. Baby (1954 -), the two eminent writers, activists and directors paved way for groundbreaking works within the theatre of Malayalam during early seventies and eighties. *Ningalenne Communistakki* means "You made me a communist" and *Nadugadhika* is translated as *Nadugadhika: A Play* by Shirley M. Joseph.

ⁱⁱⁱ It's the name of the short story collection that consist the works of the writers mentioned in this paper from the Kerala context, translated by Dr. K.M. Sherref.

^{iv} It refers to the lowest of the four Varnas within the Hindu caste system; the servants and workers of low status

^v Within the Indian Vedas, it is an ancient legal text among the many *Dharmasastras* of Hinduism which documents social laws. It is called as Laws of Manu or ***Mānava-Dharmaśāstra***

^{vi} In the context of Kerala, Pater refers to the male head of family or tribe.

^{vii} It is the dialect spoken within the historic and geographic area of southwest India covering the state of Kerala's present day Kasaragod and Kannur Districts, some regions of Wayanad District and Kozhikode District of Kerala and the entire Mahé Sub-Division of the Union Territory of Puducherry.

^{viii} GL is the short form of the novel *The General in His Labyrinth*.

^{ix} Fredric Jameson (1934) is generally considered to be one of the foremost contemporary Marxist literary critics writing in English. He has assimilated number of theoretical discourses into his project and has intervened in many contemporary debates while analyzing a diversity of cultural texts, ranging from the novel to video, from architecture to postmodernism.